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A growing knowledge base on women's economic empowerment in market systems programming



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All blogs

Is the Roadmap relevant to current market systems thinking?

There were relatively few research and guidance documents on women's economic empowerment (WEE) in market systems pre-2010. Those that did exist tended to focus on business services for women, women-focused value chains and to a lesser extent women's integration into business service markets or value chain systems (and were very effective in that regard). We are now fortunate to have access to many more quality resources on WEE in market systems to support our work.

In 2011 and 2012, seminal publications on WEE in market systems became available and are still relevant and widely used today:

- [ICRW's Measuring women's economic empowerment: definition, framework and indicators](#)
- [M4P Hub's/ SDC's How can the making markets work for the poor framework work for poor women and for poor men?](#)
- [USAID, IFPRI and OPHI's Women's empowerment in agriculture index](#)

Since that time, these resources have been expanded upon and developed in exciting ways by programmes around the world – many with which readers of this blog are familiar.

However, in this and my [next blog](#), I would like to discuss some of the resources that are not as much in the mainstream of the BEAM Exchange community. For this blog,

I examine the UN Foundation and Exxon Mobil Foundation's **Roadmap for promoting women's economic empowerment** and its relevance to market systems practitioners.

Adding to the knowledge gap

I began tracking the Roadmap initiative with their first publication in 2013, finding the resource to be informative at a general level. The learning was underpinned by WEE case studies that provided valuable insights from various projects and regions, although they did not incorporate market systems thinking in the narrative. Further, the analysis that was built on the cases ran counter to market systems thinking. For example, a matrix of different types of financial services and the categories of women (e.g. poor farmers, microentrepreneurs) who would benefit from the services did not have the level of nuance that we would expect in market systems analysis. That is, the classification did not recognise the non-homogenous characteristics of populations and the multi-dimensional nature of poverty.

Since 2013, The Roadmap initiative has grown, commissioned more studies ('empirical evaluations'), conducted more analysis for programming guidance, and developed a measurement framework. The **empirical evaluations**, or case studies (there are over 135 in the database), continue to be interesting in and of themselves, and many embody systems thinking without necessarily using systems language. For example, a 'meta-analysis' that explores women's land rights and their impact on other variables (e.g. access to credit, autonomy) makes for fascinating reading as do many of the other cases. And, as the evaluation studies are quantitative, impact analysis informs the understanding of systems change for a given context. Also, there are papers on support functions of a system such as infrastructure – e.g. rural electrification – and how this impacts women's empowerment. So, even without talking about systems analysis, these cases can still be of interest to market systems practitioners. Moreover, an excel spreadsheet is available that describes each case study and it is therefore easier to choose the ones that are most applicable to one's own work.

Further thinking required

From a market systems perspective, the analysis still falls short – for example, the **country scenarios** framework appears to focus on target groups with limited disambiguation and without considering the richness on the ground (as aptly evidenced by the case studies). That is, the two country scenarios at the lower end of the economic spectrum are: 1) 'high fertility agrarian economies' (low-income countries?) that are described as those countries where target women for empowerment initiatives should be very poor entrepreneurs, poor farmers, poor entrepreneurs, non-poor farmers and young women; and 2) 'declining fertility urbanizing countries' (low-middle countries perhaps) where women's empowerment

programming is advised to target poor entrepreneurs, non-poor entrepreneurs, wage workers and young women. This analysis does not take into consideration (for example) the high percentage of poor rural women in middle income countries who are still mainly dependent on farming and have potential for greater empowerment as agricultural and non-agricultural workers and entrepreneurs.

The [measurement framework](#) describes in clear terms the process from output to outcome to impact. It offers a comprehensive set of indicators that measure intermediate and ultimate outcomes for individual women and groups of women: e.g., willingness to purchase services, increases in income and decision-making on the farm or in their business. These are a helpful set of reference indicators, but they do not offer insights into how we can more effectively measure systems change vis a vis women's economic empowerment. For example, industry-wide policies and practices that reduce discrimination and encourage enforcement, more suppliers offering appropriate products and services that are demanded by women, or women's earnings as a percentage of household income.

In short, the Roadmap case studies are informative and thought-provoking, and the indicators are a useful reference for measuring individual or group change, but the overall analysis and the measurement framework are not additive to current thinking in market systems programming. 'eam

My next blog will be on some leading-edge work by the Australian government and its development programmes that can contribute to systems thinking around women's economic empowerment. Email contact@beamexchange.org to be notified when the next blog is published!

Dr Linda Jones is a globally recognised expert in the inclusive development of markets and financial systems with a particular focus on women's economic empowerment. As a consultant, Linda has advised on a wide range of bilateral, multilateral and NGO programmes, and has held senior positions at the Aga Khan Foundation, Coady International Institute and Mennonite Economic Development Associates.

[View all the Roadmap resources.](#)

[Read blog two.](#)